

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An electronic commerce system comprising a server operating on one or more computers and operable to:

communicate a search query for one or more products to one or more seller databases that contain product data, each seller database operable to generate local search results responsive to the search query;

communicate one or more sorting parameters to the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing each seller database to sort the local search results generated at each seller database in response to the search query;

receive sorted local search results from one or more of the seller databases;

merge the sorted local search results received from the seller databases to generate merged search results;

sort the merged search results according to the sorting parameters; and

communicate the sorted merged search results to a user.

2. The system of Claim 1, wherein the sorting parameters further direct each seller database to initially communicate no more than a specified number of sorted local search results in response to the search query and direct the server to initially communicate no more than the specified number of merged search results to the user.

3. The system of Claim 2, wherein the server is further operable to:  
initially communicate no more than the specified number of sorted merged  
search results to the user;  
receive a request for additional search results from the user;  
5 determine that all of the sorted merged search results have been communicated  
to the user;  
request additional sorted local search results from the seller databases;  
receive no more than the specified number of additional sorted local search  
results from one or more of the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing that  
10 each seller database communicate no more than the specified number of sorted local  
search results at a time;  
merge the additional sorted local search results received from the seller  
databases to generate additional merged search results;  
sort the additional merged search results according to the sorting parameters;  
15 and  
communicate the additional sorted merged search results to the user.

4. The system of Claim 2, wherein the number of merged search results is  
less than or equal to the product of the specified number and the number of seller  
20 databases to which the search query is communicated.

5. The system of Claim 1, wherein the server is further operable to:  
receive a request from the user for a specified number of search results to be  
initially communicated to the user; and  
25 initially communicate no more than the specified number of sorted merged  
search results to the user.

6. The system of Claim 5, wherein the server is further operable to  
communicate a sorting parameter directing each seller database to initially  
30 communicate no more than the specified number of sorted local search results in  
response to the search query.

7. The system of Claim 1, wherein the sorting parameters are selected from the group consisting of product attributes, product attribute values, seller attributes, and seller attribute values.

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8. A method for processing search results in an electronic commerce system, comprising:

communicating a search query for one or more products to one or more seller databases that contain product data, each seller database operable to generate local search results responsive to the search query;

communicating one or more sorting parameters to the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing each seller database to sort the local search results generated at each seller database in response to the search query;

receiving sorted local search results from one or more of the seller databases;

merging the sorted local search results received from the seller databases to generate merged search results;

sorting the merged search results according to the sorting parameters; and

communicating the sorted merged search results to a user.

9. The method of Claim 8, wherein the sorting parameters further direct each seller database to initially communicate no more than a specified number of sorted local search results in response to the search query and direct that no more than the specified number of merged search results to be initially communicated to the user.

10. The method of Claim 9, further comprising:

initially communicating no more than the specified number of sorted merged search results to the user;

receiving a request for additional search results from the user;

5 determining that all of the sorted merged search results have been communicated to the user;

requesting additional sorted local search results from the seller databases;

10 receiving no more than the specified number of additional sorted local search results from one or more of the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing that each seller database communicate no more than the specified number of sorted local search results at a time;

merging the additional sorted local search results received from the seller databases to generate additional merged search results;

15 sorting the additional merged search results according to the sorting parameters; and

communicating the additional sorted merged search results to the user.

20 11. The method of Claim 9, wherein the number of merged search results is less than or equal to the product of the specified number and the number of seller databases to which the search query is communicated.

12. The method of Claim 8, further comprising:

receiving a request from the user for a specified number of search results to be initially communicated to the user; and

25 initially communicating no more than the specified number of sorted merged search results to the user.

30 13. The method of Claim 12, further comprising communicating a sorting parameter directing each seller database to initially communicate no more than the specified number of sorted local search results in response to the search query.

14. The method of Claim 8, wherein the sorting parameters are selected from the group consisting of product attributes, product attribute values, seller attributes, and seller attribute values.

15. Software for processing search results in an electronic commerce system, the software embodied in a computer-readable medium and when executed operable to:

5 communicate a search query for one or more products to one or more seller databases that contain product data, each seller database operable to generate local search results responsive to the search query;

communicate one or more sorting parameters to the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing each seller database to sort the local search results generated at each seller database in response to the search query;

10 receive sorted local search results from one or more of the seller databases;

merge the sorted local search results received from the seller databases to generate merged search results;

sort the merged search results according to the sorting parameters; and

communicate the sorted merged search results to a user.

15 16. The software of Claim 15, wherein the sorting parameters further direct each seller database to initially communicate no more than a specified number of sorted local search results in response to the search query and direct that no more than the specified number of merged search results to be initially communicated to the  
20 user.

17. The software of Claim 16, further operable to:

initially communicate no more than the specified number of sorted merged search results to the user;

receive a request for additional search results from the user;

5 determine that all of the sorted merged search results have been communicated to the user;

request additional sorted local search results from the seller databases;

10 receive no more than the specified number of additional sorted local search results from one or more of the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing that each seller database communicate no more than the specified number of sorted local search results at a time;

merge the additional sorted local search results received from the seller databases to generate additional merged search results;

15 sort the additional merged search results according to the sorting parameters; and

communicate the additional sorted merged search results to the user.

18. The software of Claim 16, wherein the number of merged search results is less than or equal to the product of the specified number and the number of seller databases to which the search query is communicated.

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19. The software of Claim 15, further operable to:

receive a request from the user for a specified number of search results to be initially communicated to the user; and

25 initially communicate no more than the specified number of sorted merged search results to the user.

20. The software of Claim 19, further operable to communicate a sorting parameter directing each seller database to initially communicate no more than the specified number of sorted local search results in response to the search query.

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21. The software of Claim 15, wherein the sorting parameters are selected from the group consisting of product attributes, product attribute values, seller attributes, and seller attribute values.

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22. A system for processing search results in an electronic commerce system, comprising:

means for:

5 communicating a search query for one or more products to one or more seller databases that contain product data, each seller database operable to generate local search results responsive to the search query;

communicating one or more sorting parameters to the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing each seller database to sort the local search results generated at each seller database in response to the search query; and

10 receiving sorted local search results from one or more of the seller databases;

means for:

merging the sorted local search results received from the seller databases to generate merged search results; and

15 sorting the merged search results according to the sorting parameters; and

means for communicating the sorted merged search results to a user.

23. An electronic commerce system comprising a server operating on one or more computers and operable to:

communicate a search query for one or more products to one or more seller databases that contain product data, each seller database operable to generate local search results responsive to the search query;

communicate one or more sorting parameters to the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing each seller database to sort the local search results generated at each seller database in response to the search query, the sorting parameters further directing each seller database to initially communicate no more than a specified number of sorted local search results in response to the search query and directing the server to initially communicate no more than the specified number of merged search results to the user;

receive sorted local search results from one or more of the seller databases;

merge the sorted local search results received from the seller databases to generate merged search results, the number of merged search results being less than or equal to the product of the specified number and the number of seller databases to which the search query is communicated;

sort the merged search results according to the sorting parameters;

initially communicate no more than the specified number of sorted merged search results to a user;

receive a request for additional search results from the user;

determine that all of the sorted merged search results have been communicated to the user;

request additional sorted local search results from the seller databases;

receive no more than the specified number of additional sorted local search results from one or more of the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing that each seller database communicate no more than the specified number of sorted local search results at a time;

merge the additional sorted local search results received from the seller databases to generate additional merged search results, the number of merged search results being less than or equal to the product of the specified number and the number of seller databases to which the search query is communicated;

sort the additional merged search results according to the sorting parameters;  
and  
communicate the additional sorted merged search results to the user.

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24. A method for processing search results in an electronic commerce system, comprising:

communicating a search query for one or more products to one or more seller databases that contain product data, each seller database operable to generate local search results responsive to the search query;

communicating one or more sorting parameters to the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing each seller database to sort the local search results generated at each seller database in response to the search query, the sorting parameters further directing each seller database to initially communicate no more than a specified number of sorted local search results in response to the search query and directing that no more than the specified number of merged search results to be initially communicated to the user;

receiving sorted local search results from one or more of the seller databases;

merging the sorted local search results received from the seller databases to generate merged search results, the number of merged search results being less than or equal to the product of the specified number and the number of seller databases to which the search query is communicated;

sorting the merged search results according to the sorting parameters;

initially communicating no more than the specified number of sorted merged search results to a user;

receiving a request for additional search results from the user;

determining that all of the sorted merged search results have been communicated to the user;

requesting additional sorted local search results from the seller databases;

receiving no more than the specified number of additional sorted local search results from one or more of the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing that each seller database communicate no more than the specified number of sorted local search results at a time;

merging the additional sorted local search results received from the seller databases to generate additional merged search results, the number of merged search results being less than or equal to the product of the specified number and the number of seller databases to which the search query is communicated;

sorting the additional merged search results according to the sorting parameters; and

communicating the additional sorted merged search results to the user.

25. Software for processing search results in an electronic commerce system, the software embodied in a computer-readable medium and when executed operable to:

5 communicate a search query for one or more products to one or more seller databases that contain product data, each seller database operable to generate local search results responsive to the search query;

10 communicate one or more sorting parameters to the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing each seller database to sort the local search results generated at each seller database in response to the search query, the sorting parameters further directing each seller database to initially communicate no more than a specified number of sorted local search results in response to the search query and directing that no more than the specified number of merged search results to be initially communicated to the user;

15 receive sorted local search results from one or more of the seller databases; merge the sorted local search results received from the seller databases to generate merged search results, the number of merged search results being less than or equal to the product of the specified number and the number of seller databases to which the search query is communicated;

20 sort the merged search results according to the sorting parameters; initially communicate no more than the specified number of sorted merged search results to a user;

receive a request for additional search results from the user;

determine that all of the sorted merged search results have been communicated to the user;

25 request additional sorted local search results from the seller databases;

receive no more than the specified number of additional sorted local search results from one or more of the seller databases, the sorting parameters directing that each seller database communicate no more than the specified number of sorted local search results at a time;

30 merge the additional sorted local search results received from the seller databases to generate additional merged search results, the number of merged search results being less than or equal to the product of the specified number and the number

of seller databases to which the search query is communicated;  
sort the additional merged search results according to the sorting parameters;  
and  
communicate the additional sorted merged search results to the user.